



Discussion Questions for Brian Van Reet's *SPOILS*

1. *Spoils* is set during the early days of the Iraq War. Fourteen years later, the conflict there continues, but in a different form. What conclusions do you take from the book about the effects of U.S. policies and actions in the Middle East? Would you call *Spoils* a political novel or not?
2. Describe how gender works in the novel. Does *Spoils* point to any particular connections between sex and war?
3. What do you imagine happens to Sled after the end of the novel? Where do you picture him telling his story from?

4. The tone of *Spoils* is mostly serious, but there are moments of humor scattered throughout. Take one of these moments and discuss it. What does the novel say about the role of humor in intense situations?
5. Compare and contrast the American approach to making war with the jihadists' approach. Why do you think Van Reet included Abu al-Hool as one of the novel's three narrators?
6. Talk about the tension that develops between Abu al-Hool and Dr. Walid. What are the sources of this conflict, and how does it play out? What is at stake? Who, if anyone, wins?
7. Did this book change the way you think about war and the people who fight it? How so? What were the biggest issues or questions it raised for you?
8. Abu al-Hool, Slead, and Cassandra have various reasons for taking up arms. What are they, and how do they differ between characters? How are they similar?
9. In Chapter 15, Cassandra imagines she hears Crump's ghostly voice telling her, *There's only two ways out, Wigheard*. Crump, however, never explains exactly what these two ways are. What is your interpretation?
10. One of the themes of *Spoils* is the monetization of warfare. How is this theme expressed in the book?
11. Pick one of the pivotal choices that Cassandra makes over the course of the novel (i.e., her decision of what to do with Hafs's rifle). How is this choice informed by other decisions and events that precede it? What do you think *Spoils* says about the role of free will in war?